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ABSTRACT

Resistance to educational programs and economic development in American Indian communities comes from the Indians themselves as a direct result of their cultural attitudes and values. Much research has been done in the area of Indian education; a corresponding effort has been made in the area of economic development. No efforts have been made to put the two together with Indian participation so that maximum development of economic opportunities will be a strongly motivating factor in Indian education. Training in distribution fields, in fiscal management of local government, and in management and supervision in industry has rarely been attempted with the American Indian. The solution to the lack of economic development in Indian communities is active involvement of Indians using their mental abilities, political strengths, leadership, and insights. The place to begin is to provide the Indian with the opportunity to undertake research of a self-analytical nature that will increase understanding between Indian and non-Indian contemporaries. Only with understanding can programs be developed which will inspire Indians to a place of their own seeking and choice in America's economic society. (JH)

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INDIAN EDUCATION AND RESERVATION

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A paper

by

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NATURE AND SCOPE OF PROBLEM

It is believed that the nature of the problem in connection with economic development on Indian Reservation lies in the fact that economic growth and well-being is not a motivation for the educational process. Both education and economic development must pass the test of the cultural screen by which all Indian peoples make evaluations of any and all programs.

For many years, Indian people believed that to maintain their way of life, which is their highest priority goal, education should be avoided. But in pursuance of the Government's policy of forced assimilation, Indian young people were taken by the Government from their homes and placed in boarding schools. When local schools were determined to be the best vehicle for education of Indian young people, then it became necessary to make this education compulsory. Resistance to education continued, however, and more and more Indian young people attended school; not for the purposes of obtaining an education to make them economically self-sufficient, but to protect their parents from whatever penalties they might suffer for failure of their children to attend school. So, for a time, the educational objective of the student was to reach the 8th grade or their 16th birthday or whatever was necessary to meet the requirements of compulsory education. With the basic Indian resources remaining static and the population explosion among Indians reaching 4% increase per year with some groups, Indian leadership came face to face with some grim realities. They began to look to education then as a possible means by which their life ways could be sustained and while economic motivation began to be a factor in education, it was only to the extent necessary to maintain Indian society. An outstanding example

of this kind of evolution was the Navajo Tribe, now numbering 110,000, who only accepted education in 1946, just 24 short years ago. Their education progress has been phenomenal, but there has not been a corresponding phenomenon in economic development.

The problem is a national one because everywhere there is evidence of the lack of economic development to keep pace with economic needs or with progress in other like areas, and of the lack even to take advantage of the many natural resources of Indian people.

CURRENT STATUS OF RESEARCH

There is much research going on in Indian education most recently sparked by the National Indian Advisory Committee on Education made up of Indian leaders from throughout the country. Contracts have been negotiated with numerous universities to conduct specialized training programs for school teachers and Indian leaders. Experiments have been undertaken to develop better methods for teaching English--for the language barrier is a cumulative handicap to Indian school children. Studies are being made of the effectiveness of schools teaching Indian children and the causes of any difficulties. Training courses are being developed for the technologies and arts as distinguished from "trades" training. Here, you are faced with a complete lack of balance in educational opportunities which needs to be corrected. In effect, the Federal Government is telling young Indian people that it will spend $25 million per year in "trades" training, but only $4 million per year in professional training. Help and advice is being sought from education specialists throughout the country in public and private school systems. In addition, there are projects ranging from curriculum studies, teacher methodology, rewriting of textbooks to make them more relevant

to Indian life, writing Indian histories for use in local schools, training in local school operation and control. There has been a corresponding effort in the area of economic development of American Indians and Eskimos. A bibliography of works from 1930 through 1967 is attached to indicate the scope of this activity. But, to date, there have been no efforts to put the two together with Indian participation so that maximum development of economic opportunities will be a strongly motivating factor in Indian education. Even today, in many Indian communities, the young person who fills the traditional role of soldier, fishermen, hunter, is held in higher esteem than the young person who may excel in a non-traditional role such as a master's degree in some profession.

ONE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SITUATION

Poverty is not a new experience for Indian people as it has been with them for many years as a persistent partner. A clear distinction should be made between those poor in America who are outside the productive life of the economy and those who are poor despite their ability to participate in the labor force. These are different aspects of the problem and require different treatment. The attack on poverty must focus upon the special conditions and characteristics of the Indian population. There is no simple solution to the problem. Indian people are caught in the backwash of economic development. We have no conclusive proof that Indian people aspire to the goals of (1) maximum Indian economic self-sufficiency, (2) full participation of Indians in American life, and (3) equal citizenship privileges and responsibilities. Even should they make known that these are in fact Indian goals, then their attainment is still fraught with many obstacles. These

arise from the native culture so interwoven with the poverty culture that the two almost become one and inseparable. These cultures have many traits inimical to the objectives which are espoused for Indian people. Each of these cultures by itself poses serious barriers to economic self-sufficiency and together they have withstood the onslaught of program after program, so that today we say most Indians are as poor as any group we know of in the land of plenty.

Indian people have lived primarily on a subsistence economy, characterized by low capital investment, do-it-yourself methods, and low levels of productivity. A money economy, however, puts a high premium on managerial skill, proficiency in using capital and labor, and ambition to get ahead. People who must shift from one economy to another must go through a marked change in values. This places the Indian people on the horns of a dilemma--either to change their values or to cling to values which may result in comparative poverty, in an economic sense, amidst new and challenging opportunities for economic betterment.

Although we have referred to many Indian people as trying to wrest a living from the land as farmers or ranchers, their basic motivation is not economic but rather an effort to maintain the bases for their way of life. Their efforts are not geared to commercial markets but to subsistence, and they operate in a functional rather than a commercial manner. Their lack of interest in the accumulation of business profits and their lack of desire to ascertain the most profitable use of their own resources and labor, fit into production for their own use but not for commercial use. Their values can be equated as "an intense attachment to native soil, a reverent disposition toward habitat and ancestral ways, and a restraint on individual self-seekings in favor of family and community."

Indian people lack experience in the use of money and they are at a loss as to how to handle large sums of money wisely. One of the contemporary Indian leaders listed, as priority number one of the basic needs of his people, help in managing money. For the child's education in a money world it is the principle of saving that is of importance; that is, to postpone immediate pleausure in order to gain future satisfaction. The amount of family income and the way it is earned or acquired has a profound influence on the psychological development of the individual in the family and in the patterns of family life. The social and cultural norms of the family contribute to the choice of vocation and, to a large extent, determine values and managerial practice. Generations of living outside of a money world and commercial activity has developed an attitude among Indians in which satisfaction with simple living is a chief element. Low levels of economic aspiration are essential to the contentment they feel and they may be more completely adjusted in their life than we are in ours.

It has been reported that compared with children from more privileged environments, children from lower-class, socially impoverished circumstances tend to enter school with a qualitatively different preparation for the demands of the learning process and the behavioral requirements of the classroom. Among these children there is a high proportion of school failures, school dropouts, and reading and learning disabilities, as well as life-adjustment problems.

Where all of the education and training takes place in the family circle, parents are unable to transmit values, skills, and understandings they do not have. Their way of looking at life puts a rather indifferent value on formal education. In fact, the ideas, facts, and habits learned in school may be regarded as detrimental to the values of the family. The

youth who knows too much may no longer be satisfied to live meagerly, and the school system is a way out of the subsistence way of life. The parents may either accept this or block it.

Generally then, we can say that Indian people still cling to many of their cultural traits which may act as constraints on economic development. The basic orientation of Indian society is to the present. Indian people are not interested as much in the pursuit of happiness as in having it today. This places their society in direct conflict with the basic orientation of other societies, which is toward the future. The fact that Indians are oriented to the present makes it very difficult for their adaptation to the fast-moving and developing society which confronts them. The strong position of this nation has been based upon its ability to produce. The welfare of the country is always based upon its gross national product. So while production economics is the basis for the strength of this country, yet the Indian culture is based on consumption economics. The Indian people depended upon nature to provide them with the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter and when nature failed them, this was interpreted by them as a punishment for having, in some way, offended their Great Spirit. No thought was given that it might be better economically, to prepare for any failure of nature to provide necessities for them. With respect to nature, the Indian people have always had a reverent regard for nature and because of this, chose to live in harmony with nature. This accounts in some measure for the hostility of Indian people whenever their lands were taken for flood control or such projects because in some respects tearing up of the earth was considered by them to be a desecration of nature, known as the Mother God. The concomic benefits of these projects was of no concern to them as they had a greater concern which was almost spirtual in nature.

With the recent attention being given to the general problem of poverty among Indian people, workable solutions have not yet been propounded. There are those who feel that civilization, American style, has rendered Indian culture obsolete and irrelevant for these times. There are those who would hasten the demise of every last trace of Indianness from our contemporary scene, seeing no fruitful purpose in perpetuating a distinct Indian identity. The thinking that Indian people should abandon their culture ignores the basic desire of the Indian people to retain their Indian identity; and it ignores, too, the tremendous endurance of the Indian people. They have clung to their traditions in order to survive and they have survived. Their lands, their homes and their communities, therefore, symbolize an intimate part of their personal beings.

Managerial training, training in the distribution fields, training in fiscal management of local government, training in supervisory roles in industry--these are needs still virtually unmet. Yet, if Indian communities are to become economically viable and socially stable, Indian people must be able to take over all the jobs that will be available in those communities and not just the unskilled, the semi-skilled and menial jobs. Their problems are not solved just by jobs, but by attention also to the needs of the human spirit.

Building Indian communities anew is purposeful, and this kind of work--constructing and running their own businesses, industries, farms, ranches and local governments, is what the Indian people should be doing.

The economic opportunities in taking charge of their own communites are plentiful and could be the best environment for Indian people to launch their economic drive, which is so necessary at this point in time. Some of the areas which lend themselves readily to this effort are:

(1) All non-professional services be contracted to individual Indians, groups of Indians, or tribes, under authority of the 1910 "Buy Indian Act" --i.e., custodial, janitorial services, care and feeding of boarding school children, busing of school children, road construction and maintenance, plant management, major repairs and improvements, building maintenance, furnishing of utilities such as power, telephone, etc.

(2) Transfer of all Bureau installations, including agency compounds, to tribes or tribal housing authorities under a management plan which would include appropriate zoning ordinances, law enforcement and other municipal-type services.

(3) After referendum by the tribe or community involved, transfer of Bureau school to local communities for operation and control.

(4) Whenever capability of providing professional services exists, contracts for such services should be executed under the "Buy Indian Act" with qualified Indian individuals, groups or the tribe.

It could well be that in an effort to develop a panacea for Indian people, we overlook opportunities right at home to introduce Indian people to the economic life of this country. Management experience afforded by development of Indian communities as a positive economic force, could well be the springboard into management of businesses which are a part of the commercial and industrial economy.

Knowledge Needed and How It Should Be Used

With all of the knowledge now available, results are still lacking to a great degree if measured by standard social and economic norms. It may well be that we have enough knowledge about education, per se, but not enough understanding of the people being educated. We need a much better understanding

of human relations as a major factor in effective Indian education or economic programs. We need to understand the concept of Indian self-involvement which requires: (1) that he re-examine his attitude toward self; (2) that he must aggressively counteract and verbally combat the lingering generalized stereotypes; (3) a self-determination free of government paternalism and "forced choices"; (4) that he achieve a maximum self-directiveness; (5) that he will find self-fulfillment, will have life satisfaction and will enjoy the fruits of his labor; (6) that he live within his contemporary culture; (7) that he relate and interact meaningfully and intelligently with his environment--his life situation; (8) that he be really involved as a participating, contributing citizen within his community regardless where his community is; (9) that, with forethought and foresight, he become a change agent within his life situation; and (10) that he fills the need for Indian self-responsibility. Once this understanding is obtained, it should be respected for what it is and not for what somebody thinks it should be. Too often, attempts are made to put Indians into molds understood by others and with which they are more comfortable.

How to Get the Job Done

The job can be done if we actively and energetically involve Indians by using their mental strengths, their political strengths, their leadership, their commitments, their insights and finally their awareness of their situation in the contemporary world. This is a job which needs to be done by Indians who increasingly resent being studied by others, being told by others what their problems are and being offered ready-made solutions not of their own making. I believe there are enough professionally trained Indians who could form a research group to do a job of self-analysis and interpret their findings in a manner understandable to their contemporaries

in the non-Indian world. This contribution has never been made, let alone asked for.

An interesting project now under consideration for private funding is a study of the Indian Boarding Schools by Indian boarding school students. Everyone has studied and arrived at their conclusions about boarding schools except the Indian students who attend them. By the same token, everyone has researched Indian education and economic development except the people affected.

For the first time in a century, Indian people have rediscovered themselves as a great people and have begun to reestablish cultural and historical identity. Our role, therefore, should be to help them achieve their hopes and aspirations. We should not let our personal biases enter into their decision-making process nor should our personal opinions be imposed upon them. They must have the same options available to them as are available for other citizens generally. Only with leeway to make choices unfettered by social roadblocks can they be whole men, secure in their pride of heritage and confident in their ability to influence their own ultimate destiny. The place to begin is to provide them the opportunity--long denied--to undertake research of a nature that will increase our understanding of them. With that understanding, we can together develop programs which will inspire them to a place in society of their own seeking and choice.